



AUDIO NEWS

PLAY IT AGAIN, SAMSUNG

Samsung's YH-925 player (pictured) spearheads the company's release of several new players. It supports MP3, WMA and OGG audio files and can display photos on its 260,000-colour screen. A 1.8" disk gives it 20GB of storage, although if you need less space you can choose the smaller but similarly specified YH-820, which has a 5GB 1" drive. The YH-925 is available now for around £200, while the YH-820 is due soon for under £170.



APPLE'S BIGGER BITE

Apple has released figures that show the extent to which it dominates the US digital music market. Sales of the iPod shuffle now make up 58 per cent of the total sales of flash-based devices, up from the 43 per cent quoted in February. Even more remarkably, the company's iPod, iPod mini and iPod photo are thought to account for 90 per cent of the hard disk player market. Given such a large user base, iTunes' pre-eminence among online music stores is hardly surprising. Its US market share is currently estimated at 70-75 per cent.

Apple's CFO Peter Oppenheimer revealed the figures, adding that the company doesn't feel unduly threatened by music-playing mobile phones. With Motorola's iTunes phone is apparently imminent (see *What's New* page 26), so it seems that Apple has its bases covered in this market anyway.

RECORD INDUSTRY SCORES PEER-TO-PEER VICTORY

The record industry has scored yet another victory over illegal file sharers, forcing Canadian ISPs to hand over details of alleged peer-to-peer (P2P) uploaders.

Canada's Federal Court of Appeal overturned an earlier decision, paving the way for the country's first file-sharing lawsuits. The decision brings Canada into line with the US and European countries, including the UK, where ISP records have been used to identify sharers who were subsequently sued.

Allen Dixon, general counsel and executive director for the International Federation of Phonographic Industries (IFPI) said the ruling confirmed that file sharing was not legal and that sharers cannot hide behind data privacy laws. "This decision also helps clarify that there really are no pirate havens for illegal file sharing," he said.

The IFPI claims that worldwide action against P2P sharing has resulted in a significant decrease in the number of songs available. The nature of the technology means that action taken against sharers in one country has an effect on P2P activity globally.

REVIEW HARD DISK MEDIA PLAYER

TATUNG Elio

RATING ★★

PRICE £250 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.datamind.co.uk

DETAILS www.eliohome.com

Manufacturers of consumer electronics seem more convinced than us that there's a market for hard disk photo jukeboxes. The Elio is Tatung's entry into a sector that already includes models by established manufacturers Apple and iRiver.

The Elio has a 2.2" colour LCD that sits near the top of its highly polished black front panel. This looks rather sleek but is prone to reflections and prints from clammy fingers. Most major controls are assigned to four round buttons that surround a four-way rocker switch, in the centre of which is a backlit circle that changes colour. While it's possible to copy files to the Elio's 20GB hard disk using Windows Explorer, you can't listen to music copied in this way. Audio files are stored in a hidden folder and can't be browsed by filename.

To transfer music you must use Tatung's Media Manager software, which isn't the easiest program to use. You can't drag and drop music on the Elio, for example. Unless you rip music using the Tatung software or define your own playlist, songs are played alphabetically within each album according to the track title in their ID3 tags.

The Elio's battery lasted an impressive 11 hours and 51 minutes playing our standard MP3 and WMA files. Playback quality is fine at the Flat EQ setting, but there is no custom mode and many of the presets sound poor. It's possible to record audio through a microphone, but there's no line input.

The Elio does a better job with image files, which you can simply drag across using Windows Explorer. You can also display or copy them from an



SD card inserted in the player's slot, or transfer them directly over USB from a camera that supports Photo Transfer Protocol (PTP). The Elio itself only displays JPEG images, but it can store any content from an SD card.

Images look good on the Elio's screen but are properly visible only with the battery-sapping backlight switched on. Even then, with a viewing area that's little bigger than a passport photo, this isn't the best way to display or share photographs.

The Elio is best seen as a photo storage device that plays music, and it could be a useful backup tool for keen digital photographers. However, with only a 20GB hard disk it isn't as good value as the iRiver H340 we reviewed in *What's New, Shopper* November 2004, and that's a better audio player.

Simon Handby

✓ Decent screen and photo support

✗ Expensive; lacks audio features; awful software

SPECIFICATIONS 20GB hard disk, USB Hi-Speed interface, MP3, WMA and Wav playback, JPEG display. **Part code** TPJ-1022

HOTLIST SOUND CARD

CREATIVE Audigy 2 ZS

RATING ★★★★★

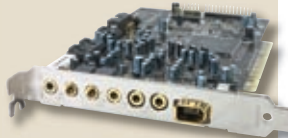
PRICE £53 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.microdirect.co.uk

DETAILS <http://uk.europe.creative.com>



The inputs and outputs on Creative's Audigy 2 ZS are capable of 24-bit, 96kHz recording and playback for increased clarity. Specialist sound cards have better signal-to-noise performance, but the Audigy's unsurpassed games effects, excellent games bundle and exhaustive DVD-Video and DVD-Audio support make it a great buy for avid gamers or music enthusiasts.



SPECIFICATIONS Line, mic and optical S/PDIF inputs, four line (7.1) outputs, PCI interface. **Part code** 70SB035000005

HOTLIST SURROUND SPEAKER SET

LOGITECH Z-5500

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £211 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.microdirect.co.uk

DETAILS www.logitech.co.uk

Logitech's 5.1 Z-5500 speakers have what it takes to satisfy most people's surround-sound needs. They're powerful enough to shake the house with 505W RMS, and they deliver rich bass thanks to the large sub-woofer.

The speakers are THX-certified and come with a DTS and Dolby Digital decoder, so you can plug in a DVD player as well as a PC.



SPECIFICATIONS 5.1 surround sound, 505W RMS, optical and coaxial digital inputs, three stereo inputs, Dolby Digital and DTS decoder **Part code** 970115-0120

REVIEW MP3 PERSONAL STEREO

PHILIPS PS110

RATING ★★

PRICE £99 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.morgancomputers.co.uk

DETAILS www.philips.co.uk

Philips' 256MB PS110 Shoxbox is no bigger than a sunglasses case, but it's crammed with a flash-based MP3 player, FM radio, battery, amplifier and speakers. It belts out amazingly powerful sound for such a compact device, and while it's unlikely to have the neighbours banging on the wall, it's loud enough for the beach or garden. The sound has a surprising amount of bass, which is impressive considering the size of the speakers.

But while the sound quality is good the Shoxbox is frustrating to use. It was slow to



respond to key presses, and the interface lacks polish. By far the worst thing, though, is the process of transferring files with the supplied Musicmatch software, which is very slow indeed. Transferring 207MB of files took nearly 17 minutes. The Shoxbox has only a USB1.1 connection, but Musicmatch halves the speed of that connection.

The integrated battery lasted 13 hours and 49 minutes when playing MP3s and WMAs at a moderate volume in our test. With storage for only

five albums, though, the PS110 could play each three times on a single charge.

There's no memory card slot to boost the storage capacity, but you can use the line input for other MP3 players or switch to the built-in radio. Without an extending aerial, though, you'll be lucky to find a station.

We managed to get a signal only with headphones plugged in, which defeats the point of having speakers.

It's hard to fault the player's excellent sound and generous battery life, but irritations elsewhere make it impossible to love.

Simon Handby

 **Excellent sound and battery life**

 **Slow file transfers; only works with Musicmatch; poor FM reception**

SPECIFICATIONS Solid-state MP3 personal stereo, 256MB capacity, USB interface. **Part code** PSS110

REVIEW HARD DISK MP3 PLAYER

RIO ce2100

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £120 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.pcworld.co.uk

DETAILS www.rioaudio.com

If Rio's Carbon MP3 player had an evil twin, it would look like the ce2100. Both share the same slim case and controls, but where the Carbon comes in silver or pearl finishes, the ce2100 is shiny black.

Inside the differences are more significant. The ce2100's 1" hard disk is only 2.5GB, so it has a lower



capacity than much of the competition. It also lacks a microphone for recording voice notes, but few are likely to miss this.

The ce2100 can be charged from the mains or through a USB cable, and its excellent battery lasted over 14 hours in our test. Filling the player with music took just over 13 minutes using the USB Hi-Speed interface.

It's straightforward to use, with a clickable scroll wheel that controls volume and menu navigation and the standard playback buttons on the front. The mono display is bright and easy to read, displaying the usual information you'd expect to find.

As with its other players, Rio supplies the ce2100 with Sennheiser earphones. These are leaps and bounds ahead of the headphones bundled with most players, and the sound quality is excellent.

The ce2100 is a top-notch player that's easy to use and has great sound, but the price could be a drawback. At £120 it's expensive for a 2.5GB player and not much less than a 4GB iPod mini. That said, there's a lot to like about this player, and you won't be disappointed with the results.

Simon Handby

 **Compact; excellent battery life; USB-charged**

 **A little expensive; no record function**

SPECIFICATIONS 2.5GB hard disk, USB Hi-Speed interface, MP3, WMA and Audible format playback. **Part code** ce2100

HOTLIST HARD DISK MP3 PLAYER

CREATIVE Zen Touch

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £147 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.dabs.com

DETAILS <http://uk.europe.creative.com>



It may look like a poor man's iPod, but the Zen Touch has a few features going for it over its famous rival. Its headphones are better, it provides plenty of volume and the battery lasts an astounding 23 hours.

It's simple to use, great value for money and comes highly recommended.



SPECIFICATIONS 20GB hard disk, USB Hi-Speed interface, MP3, WMA and Wav playback. **Part code** 70PF099000000

HOTLIST HARD DISK MP3 PLAYER

ARCHOS Gmini XS200

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £165 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.dabs.com

DETAILS www.archos.com



Barely bigger than 2GB players, the Gmini XS200 squeezes a 20GB hard disk into its tiny case. It still has a large screen, though. Only the unlabelled buttons gave us some trouble, and we frequently pressed the wrong key. However, for the price it's amazing value and works well.



SPECIFICATIONS 20GB hard disk, USB Hi-Speed interface, MP3, WMA and Wav playback. **Part code** 500669

HOTLIST 2.1 SPEAKERS

TRUST 2.1 Speaker Set SP-3600A

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £33 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.microdirect.co.uk

DETAILS www.trust.com



These classy speakers have a remote that includes a volume control, line input and headphone socket. Sound quality was extremely good in our tests, with solid bass and detailed mid and high frequencies. They aren't massively loud, and the satellite cables are only 1.5 metres long, but they're great value.



SPECIFICATIONS 2.1 speakers, line and aux inputs, 28W RMS power. **Part code** 14235

REVIEW **STEREO EDITOR****SONY**
Sound Forge 8

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £200 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.scvlondononline.co.ukDETAILS www.mediasoftware.sonypictures.com

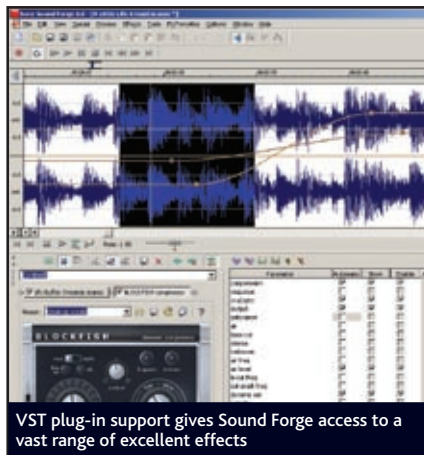
Most audio programs that started life as stereo file editors have embraced multitrack recording, but Sound Forge has stuck to its guns. Eight versions in, its core duties of cropping, normalising, fading, reversing and generally manipulating audio files remain delightfully easy and fast to use.

This doesn't mean Sony hasn't bothered to develop the software since the company acquired it from Sonic Foundry in 2003. In fact, version 7 was released less than a year ago and included a major update in the form of effects automation (see *What's New, Shopper* November 2004).

The big story in version 8 is support for VST plug-in effects. Sound Forge has supported DirectX plug-ins for years, but many more plug-ins are for VST only. These range from superb free ones such as those at www.digitalfishphones.com to Sony's flagship plug-ins (www.sonyplugins.co.uk), which run on specialist DSP hardware but interface with host software through the VST standard. The only disappointment is that Sound Forge doesn't bundle more effects. The ones included are comprehensive and high quality but lack the flair of certain – admittedly more expensive – third-party plug-ins.

Version 8 also adds ASIO support. ASIO is a type of sound card driver that helps reduce the latency between sound card and software. It doesn't make Sound Forge noticeably more responsive but it's welcome nonetheless, especially as some sound cards offer extended sample rates or bit depths from their ASIO drivers.

The VST plug-ins merge seamlessly with the existing DirectX support, so there is little to



VST plug-in support gives Sound Forge access to a vast range of excellent effects

differentiate Sound Forge 8 visually from its predecessor. A new scrub control is useful for finding a particular section of audio quickly or trying out effects before reaching for the Process menu. Keyboard commands can be customised to create useful short cuts, but after that the list of new features becomes minor and obscure.

That's not the end of the good news, though. UK distributors bundled version 7 with Sony CD Architect, which is the best audio CD-authoring program available. This time Sony does the bundling itself, and the latest version adds CD Text support. However, the best thing about Sound Forge 8 is that the UK price has been slashed from around £300 to £200. This, along with VST and ASIO support, means that an already excellent package is more attractive than ever.

Ben Pitt

✓ Fast, precise audio-editing tools; now compatible with VST plug-ins

✗ Uninspiring set of bundled plug-ins; no surround-sound support

SPECIFICATIONS Windows 2000/XP, 500MHz processor, 128MB RAM, 150MB disk space. **Product code** SFNRSB8000

CHOOSING A...

SOUND
CARD

Pick up the beat with our guide to selecting the best sound card

1 A sound card with the specs below can cost as little as £10, but it's worth spending more for improved sound quality. If you're upgrading, consider paying extra for other exciting features.

2 DVD enthusiasts will need a Dolby Digital decoder for surround-sound DVD audio. This is built into most DVD playback software, so a 5.1 output sound card will suffice. PowerDVD and WinDVD software comes in two-channel and six-channel versions. Make sure you have the six-channel version for surround playback.

3 Games enthusiasts will appreciate surround sound, but support for 3D standards adds further excitement. DirectSound 3D allows sounds to pan around the speakers; Sensaura and Aureal technologies make the effect even more convincing. EAX simulates acoustics of games environments. EAX Advanced HD enhances the capabilities of EAX in compatible games.

4 Those serious about audio fidelity require high-quality digital-to-analogue and analogue-to-digital converters (DACs and ADCs). Most PC audio runs at 16-bit, 44.1kHz, but higher-specified DACs and ADCs running at 24-bit, 96kHz perform better. Creative Audigy 2 cards play DVD Audio discs, including a stereo 192kHz recording and a surround 24/96 recording.

5 For music production, get a card with all the analogue and digital connections to wire up the rest of your studio gear, plus ASIO drivers for better performance in compatible software.

6 PCI is the standard interface for sound cards, although some add an external or drive bay-mounted expansion box for extra sockets. USB devices are also available to meet most needs.

FILL IN YOUR SPECS HERE
(Recommended minimum in grey)**INPUTS:** Mic, line**OUTPUTS:** Three line (5.1 surround)**CONVERTER SPECIFICATION:**

16-bit, 44.1kHz

3D SUPPORT: DirectSound 3D**INTERFACE:** PCI**HOTLIST** **INTERNET RADIO SOFTWARE****XTRAMEDIA**
Replay Radio 5

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £20 inc VAT

DETAILS www.xtramediasoft.com

As more and more radio stations go online, the internet is becoming the perfect place to listen to your favourite programmes. With Replay Radio 5, you can schedule recordings with an online EPG. It's easy to use, works well and even integrates with iTunes.

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98 or later, 233MHz Pentium processor, 64MB RAM, 5MB disk space

**HOTLIST** **ONLINE MUSIC STORE****EMUSIC**
eMusic

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE \$10 (around £5) per month

DETAILS www.emusic.com

eMusic is an online music store for independent record labels. It has a catalogue of 550,000 tracks, most of which are available for download by UK users. A subscription of \$10 (around £5) a month buys you 40 tracks, and there's no digital rights management so you can use them on any player or device.

REQUIREMENTS Web browser, internet connection

